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STATE PASS TO AID

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST AND IRAQ

#### Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, August 6, focuses on Israel's increased measures of isolation against Palestinian towns and cities, and highlight Israel's bombing of Gaza in response to the Palestinian suicide bombing. Front-page reports also highlight the Security Council's deliberation regarding Iraq's invitation for a visit by the inspectors. The same reports highlight Washington's rejection of Iraq's similar invitation to Congress to visit Baghdad.

#### Editorial Commentary on Middle East

-- "Who convinces Bush of his responsibility for the violence"

Chief Editor Taher Udwan writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (08/06): "President Bush alone has the power to drive the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation out of this cycle of murder and violence and towards just and peaceful solutions. This fact means that the President of the United States bears the responsibility of the consequences of his Middle East policy. By adopting policies that support Sharon's military operations and political objectives, President Bush has pushed the Palestinians into a spot where life and desperation are one and the same. The Palestinians' belief in the justice of their cause and their struggle has nothing to do with the nature of the ruling regime. Their struggle with Israel and its occupation has everything to do with defending the identity, the land and the homes. It has everything to do with their right to live like human beings, to determine their own destiny on their own soil, as opposed to giving in to the invaders who want to uproot them altogether from geography and history."

-- "Israeli measures reflect the Sharon government's political bankruptcy"

Semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Ra'i (08/06) editorializes: "The iron-fist measures adopted by the Sharon government against the Palestinian civilians reflect more a political and military bankruptcy rather than a vision towards seriously reviving the peace process or towards learning the lessons from events over the past few months. All these measures have proven futile in breaking the will of the Palestinian people and in forcing them to surrender and give up their national rights. Israel's insistence on continuing to use force, oppression, destruction and arrests means that it is firing a fatal bullet into the peace process and thwarting all efforts, without actually providing an alternative or a political project that can be adopted."

-- "It is the Palestinian people's expensive war for independence"

Daily columnist Sultan Hattab writes on the semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Ra'i (08/06): "the Palestinian war for independence continues. Sharon is responsible for the killing of Israelis and Palestinians, because he is entrenching his occupation with blood and is denying the Palestinians their freedom and security. We could differ in opinion about the type and usefulness of Palestinian operations, but that is a minor detail. The Palestinian people's war for independence continues. Those who can do anything to bring this day closer must do, and those who cannot must shut up. The Palestinian path to independence is hard and requires support and encouragement, and not people who stand in

the way. As long as there is occupation, there is either humiliation or blood. I believe the Palestinians have already opted for the second."

Editorial Commentary on Iraq

-- "Legal concerns"

If the United States is to launch a war against Iraq soon, what legitimizes such an attack from both national and international perspectives? U.S. Democratic Senator Joseph Biden, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee raised the specter of the legality of waging war against Iraq without congressional consent. Internationally, an attack by any U.N. member state against another must reckon with the U.N. Charter. None of the existing U.N. Security Council resolutions on Iraq offers a legal basis for a fresh attack on Baghdad. What complicates and even clouds the issue of whether to start a war against Iraq is the incoherence of the rationale offered to explain the urgency of such a war. For national and international purposes, one wonders what really is the ultimate objective of a U.S. war on Iraq. Is it the toppling of the Iraqi regime led by Saddam Hussein? Or is it the elimination of all real or imaginary weapons of mass destruction existing on Iraqi soil? Better still, Washington could very well be aiming to achieve the two goals simultaneously. In either case, before the U.S. president is able to seek and obtain congressional consent to go to war against Iraq, he must first articulate his purpose to the House and Senate. And if Bush succeeds in convincing the U.S. Congress that his justifications for going to war are legitimate, he will still have to reckon with international authority. Against these backdrops, the United States would remain ill put to rationalize and legitimize an attack against Iraq."

GNEHM